

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A digital signal processing apparatus comprising:

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said inquiry information being generated based on digital data which have been recorded on a storage medium loaded by a customer into the apparatus after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process;

receiving means for receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

discriminating means for judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

controlling means which, if said discriminating means judges said digital data to be legitimately purchased data, then executes a process to offer an additional service to said customer.

2. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means either copying or moving said digital data from said storage medium to

another storage medium.

3. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version, into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing the unconverted digital data with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

4. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

5. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process of a predetermined bit rate, into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process of a different bit rate, before replacing the unconverted digital data

with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

6. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produced said digital data purchased legitimately by said customer from said information center.

7. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 1, further comprising inputting means for inputting identification information for identifying said digital data which have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are subject to said inquiry;

wherein said identification information input through said inputting means is transmitted to said information center over said communication line.

8. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 7, wherein said information center comprises:

receiving means for receiving said inquiry information and said identification information for identifying said digital data which have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are subject to said inquiry transmitted from said digital signal processing apparatus;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from said information center based on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on said digital data retrieved by said retrieving means;

comparing means for comparing said reference inquiry information generated by said reference inquiry information generating means with said inquiry information received by said receiving means;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a result of the comparison by said comparing means; and

transmitting means for transmitting said inquiry result generated by said inquiry result generating means.

9. A digital signal processing apparatus according to claim 8, wherein said reference inquiry information generating means subjects part of said digital data retrieved by said retrieving means to a low bit rate coding process executed by a software encoder, the coded data part being compared with said inquiry information by said comparing means.

10. A digital signal processing apparatus

according to claim 1, further comprising charging means for processing charges;

wherein, if said discriminating means judges that said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data, then said charging means either charges nothing or a reduced amount on said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.

11. A digital signal processing method comprising the steps of:

transmitting identification information and inquiry information to an information center over a communication line, said identification information identifying digital data which have been recorded on a storage medium loaded by a customer into a terminal device after undergoing a predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are to be transmitted from said terminal device, said inquiry information being generated based on said digital data;

receiving a result of an inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

if said digital data are judged to be legitimately

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purchased data, then executing a process to offer an additional service to said customer.

12. A digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises either copying or moving said digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

13. A digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version, into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing the unconverted digital data with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

14. A digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

15. A digital signal processing method according to claim 11, wherein said additional service offered to







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receiving means for receiving identification information and inquiry information from said terminal device over a communication line, said identification information identifying said digital data which have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are subject to an inquiry, said inquiry information being generated by said terminal device based on said digital data;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from a digital data storage of said information center based on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on the retrieved digital data;

comparing means for comparing the generated reference inquiry information with the received inquiry information;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a result of the comparison; and

transmitting means which, if the comparison reveals a match between the generated reference inquiry information and the received inquiry information, then transmits predetermined service information to said

terminal device.

20. A data delivery system having an information center which has a storage of digital data having undergone a predetermined low bit rate coding process, and a terminal device which is connected to said information center by a communication line and which records digital data delivered from said information center onto a storage medium loaded by a customer;

wherein said terminal device comprises:

transmitting means for transmitting inquiry information and identification information to said information center over said communication line, said inquiry information being generated based on said digital data which have been recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are subject to an inquiry, said identification information identifying said digital data;

receiving means for receiving a result of said inquiry conducted by said information center based on said inquiry information;

discriminating means for judging, based on said result of said inquiry, whether said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data; and

controlling means which, if said digital data are judged to be legitimately purchased data, then executes a process to offer an additional service to said customer; and

wherein said information center comprises:

receiving means for receiving said identification information and said inquiry information from said terminal device, said identification information identifying said digital data which have undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process and which are subject to said inquiry;

retrieving means for retrieving said digital data subject to said inquiry from the digital data storage of said information center based on said identification information for identifying said digital data;

reference inquiry information generating means for generating reference inquiry information based on said digital data retrieved by said retrieving means;

comparing means for comparing said reference inquiry information generated by said reference inquiry information generating means with said inquiry information received by said receiving means;

inquiry result generating means for generating an inquiry result based on a result of the comparison by

said comparing means; and

transmitting means for transmitting said inquiry result generated by said inquiry result generating means.

21. A data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means either copying or moving said digital data from said storage medium to another storage medium.

22. A data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a predetermined version, into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process with an algorithm of a more advanced version, before replacing the unconverted digital data with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

23. A data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means restoring said digital data having undergone said predetermined low bit rate coding process onto said storage medium.

24. A data delivery system according to claim 20,

wherein said additional service is offered to said customer by said controlling means converting said digital data recorded on said storage medium after undergoing said predetermined low bit rate coding process of a predetermined bit rate, into digital data having undergone a low bit rate coding process of a different bit rate, before replacing the unconverted digital data with the converted digital data on said storage medium.

25. A data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said additional service offered to said customer comprises furnishing said customer, free of charge, with a product related to a producing party who produced said digital data purchased legitimately by said customer from said information center.

26. A data delivery system according to claim 20, wherein said terminal device further comprises charging means for processing charges; and

wherein, if said discriminating means judges that said digital data recorded on said storage medium are legitimately purchased data, then said charging means either charges nothing or a reduced amount on said customer for said additional service offered to said customer.